

JOHN DE WITT

THE PLACE OF THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY
IN MODERN HISTORY

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THE PRESBYTERIAN
AND REFORMED REVIEW

No. 35—July, 1898.

I.

THE PLACE OF THE WESTMINSTER ASSEMBLY
IN MODERN HISTORY.*

THE work done by the Westminster Assembly of Divines, in one aspect of it, is "the ablest and ripest product" of the Reformation of the sixteenth century. But, in another view, it is the starting point of that splendid religious and political development of the English-speaking peoples, which, on its religious side, is marked by the evangelical revival and the modern Christian propaganda at home and abroad; and, on its political side, is marked by the enfranchisement of the peoples of the United Kingdom, the building up of autonomous colonies within the British empire, and the planting of the continental republic of the United States. Of course, every work done by man, just because it has place in the organic historical movement, has roots in the past and bears fruit in the future. Of the most of these works, we are entitled to say that each of them is one of a vast number of equally important steps which men are always taking in the march of humanity to its predestined goal.

But we shall fall into a grave historical error if we assign to the finished work of the Westminster Assembly a function in the history of the English-speaking peoples of any other than the highest and most critical import. The waters of the great Lakes move continuously through the St. Lawrence basin to the Atlantic Ocean. At no point is the movement uninteresting or without

* An address delivered at the celebration, by Princeton Theological Seminary, of the two hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the adoption of the Westminster Standards.

significance. But between Lake Superior and the Gulf of St. Lawrence there is a point of physical crisis. The waters, which down to this point have flowed peacefully in their ample channel, are here assembled in a narrow space. Moving with incredible swiftness, they are constrained by the pressure of their rocky environment to formulate themselves into the sublimest physical object on the continent; and then they pass in peace again to bless and beautify new lands and cities, until they are welcomed and embraced by the great and wide sea. Thus, Niagara is both a great climax and a great point of departure. Such are all the great historical events. All have this double character of end and beginning. Rich in themselves and in what they bring from the past, they are the finished harvest of their day. Abounding in vitality, and therefore pregnant of the future, they are "the seed corn for seasons yet to come." Such above all other events was the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem of Judea; such the triumph of Constantine over Maxentius and the march of the victor from the Milvian bridge to Rome; such the posting of the *Theses* on the door of the city church of Wittenberg; and such, we claim, so far as the English-speaking peoples are concerned, was the work of the Westminster Assembly of Divines.

A great historical event acquires its attribute of greatness from the historical greatness of the idea which it vitally embodies and expresses. If the idea is a history-producing idea, if it is really epoch-marking and era-making, then the event, which the idea has organized and which in turn organizes the idea for a new career, becomes a great historical event. And, therefore, in order to justify the claim we make for the Westminster Assembly and its work, that they are entitled to the distinction of a great historical event, we must show that the idea which organized the Assembly, and which, in turn, the Assembly organized for a new career, was itself a great historical idea; and by the term historical I mean epoch-marking and era-making.

For we must not lose sight of the truth that there is, after all, a difference in kind between personal greatness and historical greatness. Writers like Mr. Carlyle and his disciple, Mr. Froude, have done their best to confound the two and to make their readers believe that there is no profound difference between biography and history. But the difference is real and is a difference in kind. Personal greatness is the greatness of individual gifts in expression. Historical greatness is the greatness of great ideas in realization. Personal greatness and historical greatness do at times coalesce in a single movement. But there are other movements in which the idea uses the man of gifts against his

will. Who are the two men of modern history that, in the spheres of war and European politics, have done the most to destroy the right of kings and absolutism? Frederick the Great and Napoleon Bonaparte, we all shall say. The one a believer in kingly right, the other a military despot; both great men, and both the leading men of a great historical era. But the era is historically great, not because they of purpose made it what it was; but because the idea which dominated the era was immensely more pervasive and powerful and abiding than either or both of these great personalities, and used them as puppets to effect a political revolution which Frederick as a king hated, and which Napoleon as a Caesar would have blown to atoms with shotted guns. Such is the wide separation between personal and historical greatness. The one is the greatness of special gift; the other is the greatness of great ideas realized.

Now, what we are claiming for the Westminster Assembly of Divines is not personal but historical greatness. We are not concerned, in these commemorative services, to show that it had the picturesqueness of a deliberative body, led and dominated by one or two colossal personalities who towered far above their peers and who thus lent to its procedure what Mr. Matthew Arnold calls the quality of interest. Mr. Arnold disliked Puritanism, and, therefore, criticised American life, the outcome of Puritanism, as uninteresting: and it was uninteresting to him because it lacks the variety and picturesqueness of a society marked by accepted personal inequalities. It is to his credit that, on a nearer view of American life he did confess, in a private letter, that "he liked the way in which the *people*, far lower down than in England, live with something of the life and enjoyment of the cultivated classes." But after all, American life was uninteresting to him because it is not picturesque; and for him it was not picturesque because there is not an adequate place assigned in it to dominating personality. Just so, the Westminster Assembly of Divines is uninteresting to not a few historians, because the quality of picturesqueness is lacking in it, because there is a striking sameness and equality in the units which composed its active membership. But is this not really to say, that the *idea* which the divines were bringing to realization, dominated the men who were doing that work; and that, therefore, the Assembly is larger and greater in its historical aspect than in its personal features?

As we are thus brought to the idea which organized the Assembly, and which the Assembly in its turn was reorganizing for new triumphs, let me preface its statement with the remark that we shall not wonder that the Assembly lacks the trait of picturesque.

ness and inequality, the trait which Mr. Matthew Arnold calls the quality of interest. For this constitutive idea, which compelled the Assembly's gathering, which dominated its sessions, and which appears as regulative in its finished work, is precisely the idea which, since that time, has been robbing English-speaking society of the trait of picturesqueness and inequality which the anti-Puritan *litterateur* found a trait so interesting.

Can we gather from the study of these extended and highly specialized symbolical books and from their preceding and contemporaneous history a formula of this vital and pregnant idea? I am confident that we can. I am confident that we shall make no mistake if we say that it is embodied in the proposition, that the living and holy God is the one absolute sovereign, realizing in history His eternal and perfect plan, with means by His providence or without means by His Spirit when and where and how He pleaseth. This was the idea whose power in antecedent history brought the Westminster divines together; this was the idea which ruled them in the formulation of their symbols of doctrine and of government; and it is this idea of the sovereign God unfolding in history, mediately and immediately, His own most wise and holy purpose, that, as reëmbodied by them, has proved the most powerful of all forces in the subsequent history of the English-speaking peoples.

Of course, we shall not have this idea before our minds in any adequate way, unless we emphasize the truth that the God, whom it presents as sovereign, is the free personal, and ethical God of Holy Scripture, and so in absolute contrast to the Force of the Materialist, the Idea or Nature of the Pantheist, and the cold and distant Supreme Being of the Deist. "For," as has well been said, "the Biblical representation of Deity not merely excludes all those conceptions of Him which convert Him into a Gnostic abyss, and place Him in such unrevealed depths that He ceases to be an object of either love or fear, but it clothes Him with what may be called individuality of emotion or feeling. The Bible is not content with that inadequate and frigid form of theism, that deism, which merely asserts the divine existence and unity with the fewest predicates possible, but it enunciates the whole plenitude of the divine nature upon the side of the affections as well as of the understanding. When the Bible calls Him the living God, it has in view that blending of thought and emotion which renders the Divine Being a throbbing centre of self-consciousness. The Old and the New Testaments are vivid as lightning with the feelings of the Deity. And these feelings flash out in the unambiguous statements of the Psalmist, God loveth

the righteous, God is angry with the wicked; in the winning words of St. John, God is love; and in the accents of St. Paul, Our God is a consuming fire." It is the free, living, ethical and emotional character of the God, whose sovereignty the idea announces, that gives to the idea its energizing influence when it enters the individual soul. For, as the theologian from whom I have just quoted also says, "When one realizes, in some solemn moment, that no blind force or fate, no law of nature, no course and constitution of things, but a Being as self-conscious as himself, and with a personality as vivid in feeling and emotion toward right and wrong as his own identity, has made him, and made him responsible: when a man in some startling but salutary passage in his experience becomes aware that the intelligent and emotional I AM is penetrating his inmost soul, he is, if ever upon this earth, a roused man, an earnest and energized creature." To receive into our minds, then, this energizing and history-making idea in the fullness of its meaning, we must be alive to the truth, not only that God is sovereign and free, not only that all history is the unfolding of His plan and that in its unfolding He works immediately as well as mediately, but also and especially that He is absolutely holy, and throbbing with emotion toward moral good and moral evil. For herein is its power to energize in the sphere of character and conduct.

In the modern world, this great idea began its mission in the Protestant Reformation. But the Protestant Reformation at the beginning did not give to it the place it soon afterwards assumed. The sovereignty of God in the history and destiny of every soul was the belief of Luther, as centuries before it had been the belief of St. Augustine. It was not, however, until the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* were written by John Calvin, that the great truth of the sovereignty of God was formulated and correlated to the other doctrines of Christianity in precisely the mode in which it became the great historical force it afterward proved to be in the spheres of religion and politics.

For Luther followed St. Augustine; and there is an important distinction to be made between the place which predestination holds in the doctrinal system of Augustine, and the place which the eternal purpose holds in the doctrinal system of Calvin. The profound experience of sin and grace of the North African father brought him to the conviction that God alone is the author of man's salvation, for man is unable not only to effect it, but to begin the new creation from death to life. And therefore the one ultimate explanation of the fact that regeneration is not universal is for him to be found in the sovereign and absolute predestination of God.

Thus it stands in Augustine's mind as the corollary of man's sinfulness and his spiritual inability.

John Calvin wrote no body of systematic divinity, though the theologies of the Reformed schoolmen are rooted in the *Institutes*. Calvin disliked the mediæval schoolmen; he hated their theology, and he had a feeling not unlike contempt for their method. He was a Biblical scholar and a humanist. He wrote like a man of letters for the educated of his time; but not for and not like the scholastic theologians. He saw clearly what he believed to be the great outstanding truths in theology; and he stated them clearly and defended them passionately, without resorting to analysis and without consciously constructing a system. Therefore it is, that we cannot argue from the locality of the chapters on predestination in the *Institutes* to the place which the sovereignty of God held in Calvin's mind. But we are at no loss to find that place, when we study the carefully wrought-out systems of Reformed theology which were grounded in the *Institutes*. The students of Calvin gave to this sovereignty of God not a position in anthropology, as a corollary of human inability, but a position in the doctrine of God. There, as constitutive of the whole system and dominating it, as the ultimate reason and explanation of all history and destiny, they placed the eternal plan of the sovereign and holy Triune God. As a choice, it was called *electio*; as a purpose, *propositum*; as a free decision, *decretum*; as it includes destiny, *prædestinatio*; as it is supremely authoritative, *nutus*, like the commanding affirmation of Capitoline Jupiter.

We cannot argue always from the position a doctrine holds in a system to the importance attached to it by those who hold the system. But it is a striking fact that while Augustinianism, holding predestination as a corollary, exerted no political influence and as a theology began to suffer an eclipse in the very century in which Augustine died; and while Lutheranism, following Augustinianism, yielded to semi-pelagian conceptions before Luther's death; the Reformed theology not only persisted in its integrity against the worst assaults, but from the days of Calvin has always been one of the most potent forces in Anglo-Saxon history that have wrought for civil liberty. And if I were asked why this has been the case, what is the secret of this power of the Reformed theology thus constituted, not only to persist, but also to work so mightily in political history, I do not know what other answer to give than to say, it is because it has placed in the dominating position of its system, the great truth that the living and ethical God is the one absolute Sovereign of the universe, and history is but the unfolding of His eternal plan: because constitu-

tive of its system, is the great truth that the decrees of God are His eternal purpose, whereby according to the counsel of His will, for His own glory, He hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass; and these decrees He executes in creation and providence with or without means as He pleaseth.

I need not stop to point out how this great doctrine lays the foundation for religious confidence, and gives strength and stability to religious character. As the divine decree itself cannot be the rule of our action, so the doctrine of the decree, when exerting its legitimate influence, does not in the first instance affect the human will. The decree is not to be obeyed and executed: it is to be believed and contemplated. As thus an object of faith and subject of meditation, the element of human nature on which it makes its powerful impact is not the volition, but the abiding disposition and so the character. It awakens reverence; it induces patience and fortitude in the adverse experiences of life: it begets confidence and tranquillity of soul as we think of progress and the hidden consummation of our own redemption. Individual life and the course of human history in the light of this great doctrine become not only solemn but sublime: for it is in its light alone that we can follow the thought of the great preacher who called "every man's life a plan of God." As the spirit of man, contemplating the eternal purpose, reverently bows in the realized presence of the one holy, wise, loving and absolute Sovereign of the Universe, in whose perfect counsel comprehending all history there is no possibility of chance; what room is there in the human spirit for weak and feverish exitements or hysterical alternations of feeling? And, on the other hand, what a powerful recreation of both active and passive strength of soul this contemplation of the Sovereign God from its very nature must be; as, indeed, its history reveals it always to have been!

But what we must especially note, at this point, is its tremendous power as a weapon against ecclesiastical privilege in priest and prelate; and against monarchical absolutism, whether grounded in physical force, like the Tudors', or in divine right, like the Stewarts'. For let the truth of the Sovereignty of God be lodged in the minds of the *people*, and work there to its legitimate conclusion; and Pope of Rome, and my Lord Bishop in England, and magic-working priests, and kingly throne alike must tremble, and the City of God—the Theocratic Commonwealth—must appear in time and space. And, therefore, James I was right when at the Hampton Court conference, seeing in the Scot's Presbytery the political embodiment of this very doctrine, he confessed that Presbytery and monarchy agreed no better than God and the devil.

What we might have expected this constitutive doctrine of the sovereign God to do in the sphere of government, just that it did in Britain. The time at my command does not permit me to recount in even the briefest way the history of the Reformed theology in its bearing on the religious and political life of England and Scotland up to the meeting of the Westminster divines. I can only touch on some facts which help to illustrate and confirm the truth on which I have been insisting.

The English Reformation, though the way was prepared for it by the evangelicalism of the Lollards, by the patriotism which ill-brooked the legantine courts in England, and by the humanism which, through Erasmus and More and Colet had changed the life of the universities, did not, as an outward movement, take its departure from Lollardism or Nationalism or the revival of letters. It was the king who inaugurated, as it was the king who limited it. Whatever we may say of his impulse, he did free England from the dominion of the Pope. But he created a national hierarchy and he became the supreme governor of the Church. Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Cranmer did much, even in Henry's day, to bring the constitution of Church and State into line with the Protestant Reformation, even though Cromwell was cut off by the sword of Henry, and Cranmer was limited by Henry's reactionary spirit. The reign of Edward VI gave a new impulse to the Protestant movement; and there were times when it seemed as if the English Reformation and that of the Churches on the continent would become one movement in spirit, purpose and result. But Edward soon died; and Mary Tudor ascended the throne, burning to avenge the wrongs of her Catholic mother and only too well taught by her husband, Philip of Spain, just how to do it. Her five years of rule, marked by a general apprehension of bloodshed, and illumined by the fires of not a few Protestant martyrs, gave to many of the Reformed clergy the opportunity of conference and fraternal communion with the Reformed Churches of Geneva and Germany and Holland. Their exile and their education abroad intensified their hatred of the papacy, and deepened their distrust of its ceremonies. Meanwhile, in England itself the Lollardism, which in the days of Henry VIII had become conscious Protestantism, and which while Mary was on the throne had been suppressed, reappeared in public places on the accession of Elizabeth in 1558; and was ready to listen with enthusiasm to the returned English clergy, as they denounced the Pope and demanded that even the appearance of his evil work be effaced from the English worship. But they returned with something more than this negative though burning

hatred of Rome. The idea of the absolute sovereignty of the living and ethical God, who executes His purpose mediately or immediately as He pleases, entered as a new power into the life of England and of the English Church. Thus English Puritanism was born; its positive principle, the constitutive principle of the theology of John Calvin, its negative principle, opposition to all hierarchical pretensions and all sacramentarianism in doctrine or in ceremony. The people welcomed it. The national party wondered at it. The crown opposed it.

For the crown was now worn by Elizabeth, the true daughter of Henry VIII—a Tudor in her love of power and absolutism; ambitious to be the head of the State spiritual and ecclesiastical as well as of the State temporal and political; no more a Protestant than her father was; loving dress and State ceremony; and bound to subdue all the elements of English life, religious and secular, to her imperious will. Thus, between Elizabeth the queen and the Puritan party in the English Church began a long, severe and doubtful conflict. Here, then, was the Puritan party, demanding purity in doctrine, meaning the Reformed theology; purity in worship, meaning the destruction of all semblance of sacramentarianism in hierarchy and in religious rites; purity in life, meaning that the Church of God should have the sole and sufficient power to discipline offenders. How did Elizabeth meet these demands? She met them: by the Act of Supremacy, which made her the Church's governor; by the Act of Uniformity, which fixed the obnoxious rites in the English liturgy, and made them obligatory in every congregation; by the new hierarchy, with Matthew Parker as primate, whose members were her appointed and subservient officers. And the Puritans' demand that the Church should exercise discipline, Elizabeth answered by the High Commission, organized to discipline the Puritans themselves. So the fight began; and it persisted through her reign. I cannot speak of its battles or of the leaders on either side. But surely, it were not right, at such a time as this, not to give a sentence of commemoration to that great Puritan of Elizabeth's reign, Thomas Cartwright, whose accession to the Chair of Divinity at Cambridge Froude rightly calls "the apparition of a man of genius;" who learned his theology and his polity at Geneva; and who, at this early day, fought the Puritan battle with an ability and courage not surpassed by any of the Westminster men.

Meanwhile in the northern kingdom of Scotland a similar conflict was going forward, but under different conditions. John Knox came to Scotland in 1559. The next year, with Murray as regent, a free parliament was called; the first Scottish Confession

was adopted; the Church was settled upon a regimen of Presbytery; and, in December, the first General Assembly was convened. And all just in the nick of time. For the next spring, the widowed queen of Francis II, having by her husband's death lost her high seat as queen consort on the French throne, came to Scotland to take her place as Mary Queen of Scots. Then began the conflict between the crown and the hierarchy on the one hand, and the nobility, clergy and people on the other; in which, at the beginning, Mary and John Knox were the protagonists. In its essence it was the same conflict that was going forward in England. The same theology, with the same constitutive idea, organized the Scottish that organized the English Puritans. Not Thomas Cartwright only, but John Knox also, got new light and new inspiration at Geneva. Still, there was a difference. In Scotland, the independence of the organized Church was preached as the crown right of the Mediatorial King; while in England, the absolute sovereignty of God alone carried with it the rights of the people. In Scotland, through the reign of Mary, the regency of Morton, and the reign of James VI before the death of Elizabeth, the Church, led first by John Knox and later by Andrew Melville, was upon the whole successful. The second Book of Discipline was approved; and James took the covenant. Though he afterwards tried to impose bishops on the Church, yet in 1590 he praised Presbytery as ordained of God, and two years later assented to the law by which that order was restored in his kingdom.

But very soon an event occurred which, on the one hand, led to a severer pressure than ever on the Puritan churchmen of both kingdoms; and, on the other, to a closer union between the Scotch and the English Puritans. This was the union of the two countries under a single crown. James VI of Scotland became James I of England, and ruled his double kingdom from London. The Stewart monarch brought to England a new theory of absolutism. He pressed the divine right of kings in England, where it met with sharper resistance than ever it met in Scotland. Soon, therefore, in the southern kingdom the party of civil liberty found points of sympathy with the Puritans. The two parties began to be heard in the House of Commons speaking the same things. When, in 1625, Charles I came to the throne, the conflict between the crown and the people grew more acute, and the union of the Puritan and constitutional parties in England grew stronger day by day. And when Charles, as the king of Scotland, attempted to force upon the people of that kingdom the service-book of Laud, and the covenant was subscribed, he had against him the Puritans of both kingdoms, whom

he ought to have foreseen would soon be politically united, and clamorous both for their civil rights and for the destruction of the Laudian hierarchy. It is not necessary to recount the steps of the familiar history of the rebellion: the concert of England and Scotland; the ship money; the visit of Charles to the House of Commons; the Commons' cry of privilege; the Long Parliament; the assumption of power by the Parliament; the retirement of Charles from the capital; the Solemn League and Covenant between the kingdoms; the Civil War.

The cause of the people against the divine right of kings above the law was triumphant. The people's representatives ruled at Westminster; and to no other truth was the victory so much indebted for its organization and accomplishment as to the truth which we have seen was the organizing idea of the Puritan theology—that God alone is the absolute Sovereign, and works freely, with or without means, the eternal purpose of His holy will. But the victory thus far gained in the religious sphere was negative only. So far, during the reigns of James and Charles, had the Church been moved away from Protestantism, that a reorganization of the Church was needed, as well as a restatement of its doctrinal position.

Therefore, in October, 1642, a bill convening a conference of divines to secure this reorganization and restatement was passed by Parliament; but it was vetoed by the king. The following June an ordinance of Parliament was passed, calling an Assembly of Divines to meet at Westminster on the first of July, 1643, "to effect a more perfect reformation of the Church of England in its liturgy, discipline and government on the basis of the Word of God." And so the Westminster Assembly was organized. For five years and a half its members labored at this great work and the reformulation of the Church's doctrine. The majority of the Assembly were Presbyterians. But the Parliament called also to the work Episcopalians, Independents and Erastians. The Episcopalians, because the king had vetoed the first bill and because the second was an ordinance of parliament only, took no part in the work: but Independents and Erastians shared in the debates, and though they could not accept the form of government, they cordially adopted the statement of doctrine framed by the Assembly.

Was the Westminster Assembly a body of great men? I am not so anxious to make that appear, as to hold before you the fact that it was a great historical body. Lord Clarendon has denounced the most of them as men "of mean parts of learning, and of no other reputation than of malice to the Church of England." But I

should as soon accept an estimate of St. Paul written by a Judaizing Christian in Galatia, as Lord Clarendon's estimate of a Puritan statesman or divine. John Milton attacks the Assembly as a body, and denounces their conclusions in terms as violent as the language of Eikonoklastes; but even Milton says that it was "a learned and memorable Synod." And, certainly, a Synod which held John Lightfoot, "the greatest rabbinical scholar of his day," and Stephen Marshall, whom Baillie calls "the best preacher in England," and William Twisse, the most subtle schoolman of his times, and Thomas Gataker, the greatest reader among divines, and John Selden, a universal scholar, not to mention others, must indeed have been "a learned and memorable Synod." And when to these we add the Scottish commissioners: Alexander Henderson, Rector of Edinburgh University, and Robert Baillie, Principal of Glasgow University, and Samuel Rutherford, Professor of Divinity and Principal of St. Mary's College in St. Andrews, and the brilliant young George Gillespie, keenest of the Assembly's debaters, we need not be troubled by either the slanders of Lord Clarendon or the sneers written by John Milton against the Assembly, after that body had most righteously rejected his loose doctrines of marriage and divorce.

Other speakers will speak at length of the finished creed of the Assembly. It is for me only to insist on the great historical idea which organized the Assembly itself; and to point out that it was this same idea, in both doctrine and Church government, that the Assembly organized for still further triumphs on a wider field. For just as older Reformed theologians did, so they set in the forefront of their symbols the idea of the living and ethical God, active mediately and immediately in history, and sovereign in the execution of His eternal plan.

Thus they sent it forth again, on a new religious and political mission. It became again a mighty force in securing what is best in the life of the Anglo-Saxon peoples. On the details of its later political history, I must, for lack of time, refrain from dwelling. Let me only say, that if, in England it suffered an eclipse with the restoration of the Stewarts, it was this very theology that enabled England to drive the last Stewart from the throne, and to effect the revolution of 1688. Since that day, Puritanism has been one of the great powers by which in Great Britain the enfranchisement of the peoples has been compelled, and freedom has broadened down from precedent to precedent. In Scotland and in the American colonies, the Westminster theology achieved its greatest political triumphs. I cannot speak now of Scotland: but, as we all know, it is to the New England men and the men of Ulster in America

that we owe, more than to any others, the independence and self-government we enjoy to-day: and New England and Ulster were formed by this theology. To them thus formed we owe Harvard and Yale and Princeton. To them, also, the republican simplicity of government and the democratic simplicity of society, which may God preserve!

I know that it is often said, that great as this theology is, it needed the methodism of the evangelical revival to give it fervor, and to make it influential in the sphere of the distinctively religious life. But how can I believe this, when I know that Baxter's *Saints' Rest* and his *Reformed Pastor*, and John Howe's *Blessedness of the Righteous*, and John Bunyan's *Grace Abounding* and *The Holy War* and the *Pilgrim's Progress*, are children of this very Westminster theology, and antedate the evangelical revival by nearly a hundred years? True it is, that the missionary activity of the modern Church succeeded and owes much to the evangelical revival. But the evangelical revival found its food and its opportunity in Puritanism; and it was not until after the revival that the world was opened, through the defeats of the Catholic naval powers, to the missionary efforts of the Protestant Churches.

So the idea of the living and holy God, sovereign in all history, organized the Assembly of Divines. So the Assembly of Divines reorganized the idea. So the great stream of benediction moved on from the Protestant Reformation. The Westminster Assembly was its great point of crisis—its climax, and its new departure; and, therefore, we bless God for this Assembly and its finished work.

Nor would we end by only giving thanks. For the question must arise in our minds, as indeed it has arisen in the Church of which we are members, whether this theology and polity have not, by this time, exhausted themselves as great and beneficent historical forces; and whether, standing at the beginning of a new era, we would not better revise them out of our influential beliefs, and contemplate them only with historical interest. It is not to be denied, that, though truth is eternal, the special historical mission of a specific body of truth may be temporary. It is fair, therefore, to-day and in this country especially, to bring this question before us.

Now, when I think of our social condition, of the strifes of capital and labor, of the strained relations between the wealthy and the workers; when I think of the enormous corporate aggrandizement and the enmity it has awakened against itself; I cannot but feel that we are near the beginning of a social strife somewhat like that of the French Revolution of 1789. No one can doubt, that, when the strife is ended, adventitious privilege

will go down as it has always gone down, and the cause of man will be victorious. The Commonwealth in some form will triumph. But, as I read the history of the English Revolution and the subsequent development of the English-speaking peoples, and note the normal way in which, to quote again the line of Tennyson, freedom has broadened down from precedent to precedent; and as I contrast this peaceful movement of growing liberty and equality with the bloody or excited actions and reactions, the steps forward and backward, by which France has painfully attained its present measure of civil liberty and self-government; I must believe that there is an adequate reason for the contrast. And that reason, I do not doubt I accurately state when I say that the very Puritanism which England welcomed as an element of her life in 1688, France exiled from her borders in 1685. In the revocation of the Edict of Nantes, by which the theology and polity of John Calvin were driven from his native land; and in the English Revolution of 1688, by which that theology was taken under the protection of the law; are to be found the profound reason of the sharp contrast between the movement of France and the movement of England to the modern era of the rights of man. It is one thing to pass from the era of dynastic privilege to that of human rights, under the guidance of a theology which holds us to our duty to the sovereign and holy God. It is quite another to make the passage under the guidance of a deism which recognizes rights rather than duties, and a philosophy that teaches the power of natural causes to secure the perfection of human nature. It is important, and it is timely, therefore, to point out that the contrast between the bloody movement and the peaceful movement to the modern era is due more largely than to any other single thing, to the fact, that just at the time when France was weakened and disgraced by the Revocation which drove the Huguenot Puritans from their country, England achieved the Revolution which rehabilitated in both England and Scotland that Puritanism which has done more than any other element in British life to secure and to guard the just liberties of the British peoples.

Therefore, we believe that this great theology and polity have not exhausted their resources to bless the peoples of Great Britain and America. Therefore we pray that if, as we may well believe, we are standing at the threshold of another era of social revolution, this theology, organized by the idea of the sovereign, active and holy God, may guide its movement, to the end that its career may be peaceful and its end beneficent. No better prayer than this can we, as patriots, offer to our fathers' God to-day. And we

can wish no better thing for our country than that the influence of the Westminster theology on our history may be as potent in the future as it has been in the past. If it please God that it shall be, we may be sure that at more than one more jubilee of its formulation, thoughtful, religious and patriotic men and women will gather in congregations like this, and will gratefully remember the signal goodness of God in having called together the Westminster Assembly of Divines.

PRINCETON.

JOHN DEWITT.



II.

DR. THEODOR ZAHN'S HISTORY OF SUNDAY.*

THE HISTORY OF SUNDAY, by Dr. Theodor Zahn of Erlangen, was reviewed in the January number so far as it treated of the apostolic period. That historical essay, however, bestows the most particular attention on the postapostolic period of the first three centuries. We noted Dr. Zahn's statement that the collections on the first day of the week, that Paul prescribed for the churches in Galatia and Corinth, must find their explanation in the universal custom of the next following centuries, of making offerings for the poor of the Church on that day as the day of congregational divine service. As we read on it becomes evident that he regards the literature of that period as the only authentic source of information about the original nature of the Lord's day, of which only a few obscure, though undoubted traces appear in the New Testament. He therefore draws the traits of the day as it appears to him to have been understood and observed in that age, as judged by its literature. In view of the deserved eminence of Dr. Zahn as an exponent of the literature of the Ante-Nicene age, what he publishes on this part of the history of Sunday merits especially the most respectful attention. Though his essay is in a popular form, that is, it presents the conclusions about the subject in clear and brief statements, without much sifting and expounding of the testimony, the reader knows that it is a master that writes, and feels assured that the necessary investigation has been duly attended to and underlies what he writes. So that many existing elaborate works on the same subject by eminent scholars must make a feebler impression than this essay, even if we had the essay alone. But Dr. Zahn supplements the essay by notes, and these are fuller and more numerous on this part of his subject than on any other. In them he refers very copiously to passages of the literature in question as proof of what he states. He does this to a degree unequalled by any other writer on the subject that we are acquainted with, or that is reported in Cox's *Litera-*

**Skizzen aus dem Leben der Alten Kirche*, von Theodor Zahn, D. und Prof. der Theologie in Erlangen. Erlangen und Leipzig, 1894. Essay VI: "Geschichte des Sonntags vornehmlich in der alten Kirche" (reprint of edition, Kiel, 1878).

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